

House Armed Services Committee

DEMOCRATS

For immediate release: May 11, 2005

Ike Skelton, Ranking Member

http://wwwd.house.gov/hasc_democrats

Contact:

Loren Dealy,
HASC Democratic Communications
(202) 226-6339

Jennifer Oglesby,
Rep. Snyder
(202)-225-2506

Military Personnel Subcommittee Addresses Defense Authorization Bill FY06

Washington D.C.—Today the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Military Personnel considered its portion of H.R.1815, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006.

Recruitment and Retention

The bill removes some of the restrictions that currently exist so that service members may have increased eligibility for re-enlistment bonuses. Some re-enlistment bonuses are increased to \$90,000 and available over the course of a full 20 year military career. Enlistment bonuses for those joining the service for the first time are increased to \$30,000.

“Significant demands have been placed on our Armed Forces over the last few years,” commented **Rep. Snyder**. “And through it all though they have shown that they are dedicated and committed to their duty. But these demands are not without consequence. We have been seeing a troubling development in decreased recruitment and retention rates. This bill will hopefully go a long way towards reversing that trend.”

Updating the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ)

The Subcommittee updated the sections of the UCMJ pertaining to rape and sexual assault in order to bring them into greater conformity with federal law. In addition, the statute is amended to include stalking as a separately punishable offense.

“For years, we have been trying to bring military law into the 21st century,” said **Rep. Loretta Sanchez (CA)**. “Finally, we have succeeded. Protecting the personal well-being of the women and men in our armed forces has finally been placed above an outdated legal provision that long ago abandoned the true meaning of justice.”

Transition Assistance for Wounded and Injured

The bill would permit service members who are seriously wounded in combat and incapable of returning to military duty to be assigned an assistance officer to help them as

they transition back into civilian life. The Secretary of Defense would also be required to evaluate the services' transition assistance programs and develop guidelines to standardize and improve them.

“Many of our service men and women returning from Iraq with severe injuries are finding themselves lost in a system that is lacking in comprehensiveness and stability,” said **Rep. Robert Andrews (NJ)**. “Without such a system to provide reliable information and assistance, we have allowed an extra burden to be placed on individuals and their families who are already facing a difficult challenge.”

Mental Health Issues

The bill removes the need for a physician's referral before Tricare (the military health care program) will cover mental health care services. The Secretary of Defense is also asked to examine the efforts of other countries with extensive experience treating post-traumatic stress disorder in order to glean “best practices” that may be used in treating American service members.

“I am pleased to see that a barrier to providing mental health services to our fighting men and women is being lifted,” said **Rep. Martin Meehan (MA)**. “Reducing the stigma associated with post-traumatic stress disorder is one of the key mental health issues facing our military. Raising awareness and encouraging service members and their families to seek help is the least we can do for our returning troops.”

Improving Family Support Programs

The bill adds funds to enhance the services provided for family transition assistance, employment assistance for military spouses, and relocation assistance.

“As a former military spouse, I understand first-hand how challenging life in the military can be for the families of our servicemen and women,” said **Rep. Susan Davis (CA)**. “By enhancing programs for the families left behind, we better enable them to smooth over the rough periods of transition and deployment that are a part of being a military family.”

Information is not officially included in the final version of H.R.1815 until passed by the full House Armed Services Committee on May 18th.

###